Chapter 9

Opportunities for Service-Learning Partnerships in the Information Systems Curriculum

Jonathan Lazar and Doris Lidtke
Towson University, USA

Service-learning partnerships involve students taking part in community service that relates to their academic course experience. Students who major in information systems are increasingly being provided with real-world experiences. These real-world experiences offer numerous benefits. Students can immediately apply their course knowledge to real-world situations. Students can get the experience of grappling with political, social, and ethical issues in a workplace setting. In addition, students can develop a sense of civic responsibility, by contributing their skills to their communities. This chapter presents the issues involved in implementing the service-learning paradigm in an information systems curriculum. Examples of successful service-learning courses are presented, and new possibilities for service-learning courses are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Courses in the information systems curriculum are increasingly incorporating hands-on experiences for students. Student evaluation is no longer limited to exams and research papers. Projects are becoming an increasingly common part of
the Information Systems curriculum. It is one thing to describe to students how an information system is developed, modified, or maintained. It is a totally different experience for students to experience first-hand an information system being developed, modified, or maintained. If the students can work with real users in a real-world experience to develop an information system, this is a valuable experience. The question is how to place students in an appropriate real-world setting. An educational paradigm called service-learning would seem to be appropriate for forming a partnership. In service-learning, students take part in community service experiences relating to their coursework (Jacoby, 1996). This paper will discuss opportunities for implementing the service-learning paradigm in the information systems curriculum.

SERVICE-LEARNING

Service-learning is an educational paradigm in which students take part in community service (Jacoby, 1996). This community service is structured to relate to course material, with the goal of strengthening the course experience. The idea is that the service-learning projects offer an opportunity to immediately apply the material learned in the classroom. Instead of simply discussing the concepts in a classroom setting, students get a chance to use their knowledge to assist others (Jacoby, 1996). While gaining experience working in their community, students also strengthen their sense of civic responsibility. Service-learning can provide a strong educational experience for the students involved.

Community-based non-profit organizations are in need of assistance with technology. Non-profit organizations tend to have smaller budgets for technology, and therefore cannot afford to hire many people to work on their technology needs. For instance, schools frequently cannot afford to provide Internet training for their teachers (Lazar and Norcio, 2001). In some cases, schools might be required to spend their technology budgets on capital expenses such as hardware and software, instead of developing new resources or managing existing resources or providing training (General Accounting Office, 1998). Other non-profit organizations, such as parent groups, and support groups, usually are dependent on donations of money and time to effectively utilize technology. Groups of technology workers may come in on a Saturday to wire a school for the Internet. Professional user groups may take donations of old computer equipment, refurbish and upgrade the computers, and then donate the now-functional computers to non-profit organizations in the local community. Many community groups are dependent on the goodwill of their local citizens to effectively use technology.

Service-learning is a useful technique for incorporating real-world experiences into the curriculum. Local community groups are in need of assistance with technology. Students are in need of real-world experiences that relate to their
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